

PESTICIDE IN DRINKS Pg 16

Mobile
Craze Pg 24

October 2004
Rupees 12.00



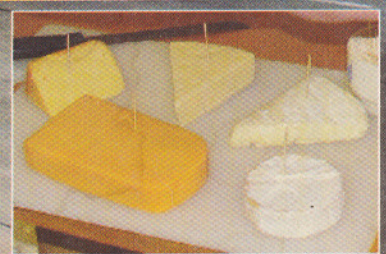
Science Reporter



SARAS *Success*



Cheese for Health
Pg 46



The SARAS programme therefore faced many trials and tribulations almost right through the 1990s. There was even a phase when SARAS became SARAS-DUET following a decision to collaborate with a Russian design agency that found the SARAS design uncannily similar to a design on their own drawing board. But the disintegration of the Soviet Union eventually finished off this stillborn collaboration.

For NAL's SARAS designers, therefore, the 1990s were difficult and traumatic. At one particularly low point, the chief SARAS designer, Dr K Yegna Narayan even wondered aloud if the aircraft project had taken away his ten most productive years (see box on page 14).

Fortunately the tide turned. Dr T S Prahlad, who took over as NAL's Director in 1996, brought in tremendous hope, enthusiasm and energy for the programme. He received marvellous support and encouragement from Dr R A Mashelkar, CSIR's Director-General. The Centre for Civil Aircraft Design and Development (C-CADD), Bangalore, was specially created by CSIR as the nodal agency to monitor and manage this national programme. The Mashelkar-Prahlad axis strongly revived SARAS and in 1999, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs formally approved the SARAS programme.

The SARAS adventure, for all practical purposes, therefore began only late in 1999. A successful first flight, just five years after the project funding – from DST's Technology Development Board, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Ministry of Civil Aviation and CSIR – came in, is therefore a very creditable achievement.

SARAS Takes to Wings

In reality, the 'inaugural' SARAS flight on 22 August 2004 was actually SARAS's seventh flight. The plane first flew on 29 May 2004 (see box on page 13) and there were subsequent test flights on 7 June, 19 July and 18, 19 and 20 August 2004. But these

"Sweet Success"

An interview with Dr K Yegna Narayan, SARAS Programme Director, NAL

How does it feel now that SARAS is airborne?

It's wonderfully euphoric. I can't find words to describe our joy when we saw SARAS in the skies.

But this is only the beginning?

Yes, of course. We still have a very long way to go. We've barely flown three hours so far. We need to fly at least 500 hours before the aircraft can be considered for certification.

Is the SARAS performance so far meeting your expectation?

These are early days. But we think we've made a very encouraging beginning. The pilots are happy with the performance.

There are concerns expressed about the SARAS weight?

Yes, the aircraft is currently heavier than what it should be. But you must realize that this is only the first prototype. We have to play very safe to start with.

How's the second prototype, VT-XRM, coming up?

It's about 60% ready. VT-XRM will fly in 2005. Once we have two aircraft flying, we can double our flying hours and reach our target of 500 hours sooner.

What does this SARAS experience mean to you?

It means a lot, really a lot! Some of us have spent 15 years working on SARAS, and waiting for the programme to take off, so this success is very special and sweet. SARAS also taught all of us to work together, both within NAL and outside NAL. My colleagues have worked hard, and made big personal and professional sacrifices.

Will the SARAS be commercially successful?

We've commissioned three market surveys by independent agencies and they all indicate a market for at least 150-200 aircraft. The Indian skies are opening up. There's a lot of excitement with low fare airlines. India is such a large country. It has so many people. Certain parts (especially the North-East) are still so poorly connected. Our economy is burgeoning. SARAS is designed to perform a variety of flying roles. I really see no reason why SARAS can't be commercially successful.

Interviewed by Srinivas Bhogle and R Guruprasad

